

Steal This Hook!

Ghoulish Tales

By Doug Beyer



Welcome again to Steal This Hook! Adventure stories thrive on horror -- fear is a natural motivator for characters to perform desperate (read: action-point-involving) acts. In the spirit of the season, and particularly in the spirit of 18th and 19th century gothic horror fiction, the theme of this edition of Steal This Hook! is *ghoulish tales*. These are adventure hooks you can use to weave a bit of gloomy, gothic horror into your *Eberron* campaign. Let's get ghoulish...

The Morgue-Mind

A murder mystery the heroes are investigating leads them to the Constable's Morgue, a particularly large corpse-storehouse run by law enforcement. The heroes stumble on a gruesome scene: the kindly old clerk at the morgue is hunched over one body with a saw, and has already mutilated several other bodies in storage there. After the clerk is apprehended, the local sheriff tells PCs that this behavior is wildly out of character for the gentle clerk; someone or *something* must have induced him to perform these awful acts. [A brain in a jar \(Libris Mortis\)](#) created by a necromancer has taken up hidden residence at the morgue, and is looking for a new body to inhabit. The diseased brain uses its psionic powers to control those around it to find the perfect body. Perhaps only the necromancer herself, full of remorse at her inability to control the awful creation, can help the PCs to stop it. Or will the brain decide that the skull of the necromancer who created it would be its perfect home?



The Bell in the Mist

The fog that envelops the Mournlands muffles most sound, but the toll of a bell echoes through the dead-gray mist, beckoning the heroes to investigate. Following the sound, the PCs discover a small church, its white paint flaking away with age, its pews rotting. The bell in the tower is being rung by the *telekinesis* abilities of two ghosts, a young girl and a young boy. When approached, they mouth silent words and flee through a wall toward the small graveyard behind the church, and the spectral form of a long-dead cleric appears in their place! Is this a malevolent spectre (*MMI*) looking to create more spectres to enthrall or a friendly ghost who needs a favor? Are the ghost children bait for the trap of a warforged necromancer or are they helpless spirits unable to leave the churchyard since the Day of Mourning?

The Hand-Takers

Someone in urban Zilargo is stealing hands. The bodies of gnomes, humans, and other races have turned up with their hands sliced off at the wrist -- over twelve such bodies in Korranberg alone. The heroes meet a crucial witness when a handless warforged comes forward with a fantastic story: that he survived an attack by a gang of rune-covered skeletons with *fleshy hands*. The bony gang overpowered him and knocked him unconscious, and

when he awoke, his appendages (one hand and one armblade) were taken. Is a group of spellstitched undead (*MMII*) the cause of the attacks? Are the attacks random, or are the victims connected somehow? Perhaps a sick-minded sorcerer wants the hands of master artisans, believing they will grant him creative power. Perhaps a Vol cultist is using the hands to imbue his animated dead minions with the arcane abilities of the hands' former owners. Either way, the bony gang (one of which now sports an armblade) may attack the characters next.

Six Piles of Ashes

Six citizens of Bluevine in Aundair have gone missing over six nights, and the remaining townsfolk seek the help of anyone brave enough to investigate. Bluevine's town meeting-place, a dusty field surrounding a huge, artistically-carved boulder outside of town, appears to be the source of the trouble. The heroes find the boulder encircled by half a dozen scorched and shallow pits, each containing a hill of ashes. The base of the boulder is blackened with soot as well -- what could be going on? Is the boulder a Gatekeeper seal designed to keep a daelkyr lord away from this plane? Or is it a focus for dark fire-elemental energies? Has magical mischief summoned a magma mephit, which is in turn summoning others of its kind to prey on sleepy Bluevine? Does the boulder conceal a geothermal vent leading down to the lair of a conflagration ooze (*MMIII*) hungry for chaos and panic?

The Leech of Zarash'ak

Zarash'ak is called the City of Stilts because of the supports that keep it above the gloomy waters of the Shadow Marches. Those same supports also hide certain...activities...that occur in the waters from being seen from the city walkways above. Grulsh was a half-orc member of House Tharashk and a productive merchant in Eberron dragonshards before he was turned into a vampire. Now the raging blood-thirst within him compels him to do evil, and he preys on the working class of the city he once loved. Using his *spider climb* ability, he creeps along the undersides of Zarash'ak walkways, snatching unsuspecting travelers and draining their blood before slinking off to a coffin sunk somewhere in the muck. The heroes are hired by House Tharashk to help them uncover the mystery of the disappearing travelers, and Grulsh's disappearance is their first priority.

Mini-hooks

Want more Eberron-style ghoulish tales? Here are some mini-hooks to prime your imagination. (Happy Halloween!)

- A pirate captain of Lhazaar was buried alive by his mutinous crew on the island of Greentarn. Rumor has it that if one spends a night in the pirate's coffin, buried alive in the same wooden box, the pirate's spirit will appear and describe the whereabouts of lost treasure.
- A deathguard paladin from Aerenal asks for the heroes' help in annihilating a charnel hound (*MMIII*) that stalks the wilds of his homeland.
- A kalashtar child's nightmares begin corrupting the thoughts of her entire village.
- When an eccentric old gnome is questioned about a series of murders, he blames the creepy marionettes that reside in his attic.
- Under deep vaults in the Mror Holds lie the remains of a long-dead madman, which must be properly buried in sanctified ground before his spirit will stop haunting the mountain passes.
- Dusty footprints lead toward, but not away from, a macabre oil painting that seems to add more and more faces onto its canvas each night.
- One clear night every year, a lightning rail junction replays the scene of a terrible crash that occurred there during the first days of the rail system.

- A rakshasa begins construction of an enormous musical instrument composed of the skulls and bones of hundreds of elves -- an eldritch machine designed to bring forth melodies capable of waking the rakshasa's dark masters.

About the Author

Doug Beyer spent a lot of time getting philosophy degrees until he figured out that he should just move to Seattle and become a web developer for Wizards of the Coast. Now he spends his days working on games and his evenings playing them. Doug uses the time normally allotted for sleeping to lurk on the Wizards.com message boards as his alter ego, WotC_Doog.

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